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THE Present Interest OF ENGLAND IN Matters of Religion, Stated.

Wherein is clearly demonstrated that the *Protestant Religion* may be fully secured from *Popery*, though the *Penal Laws* be taken away.

By *W. D.* a Lover of Liberty for Conscience sake.

Rev. 2. 7. *He that hath an ear to hear let him hear.*

With Allowance.

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The Present Interest of England *in matters of Religion, stated,* &c.

BOoks are now written to instruct the present Age, and to inform the future; that this may know what ought to be done, and that may see what has been done; and in this lies the great skill and wisdom of good men, to know and understand the work of God in their day, that they may be labourers together with God, and workers together with him, and serve their generation by the will of God. Sometimes men do not know, nor understand the work of God in their day. *Jacob* staid so long in *Canaan* till he wanted bread; God sent a Famine upon that Land, that *Jacob* and his Family might go down to *Egypt*, and to eat bread to the full. God remembred him in his low estate, but he remembred not the mighty works of God that he had seen, nor that experience he had of his love and grace, his mercies and goodness that had followed him all along; he looked upon the providences of God, and they seem'd to run cross to the promises; he looked upon the work of God, and that seem'd to be so dark, that he could see no beauty nor glory in it: He looked upon the things that then befel him, and they seem'd to work together for his hurt: And *Jacob* said, *All these things are against me.* He look't upon *Simeon* that was left behind in *Egypt*, to be a dead man, Joseph *is not*, *and* Simeon *is not*, and the going down of *Benjamin* with the rest of his Brethren, to be nothing but a trick and a design of the *Egyptians* to get all his Sons into their hands, that they might be Bondmen and Slaves at the least: And he said, *Me have ye bereaved of my Children.* When *Jacob* saw the glory of God's

1 Cor. 3. 9.
2 Cor. 6. 1.

Gen 42. 36.

work appear, then he rejoyced; but the way to that glory he did not understand. Now that which God intended and designed by all this, was the fulfilling of his word, the glory of his holy name, the increase of his Church, that he might make of them a great Nation, as he had promised. *And the Lord said unto* Abraham, *Know of a surety, that thy Seed shall be a stranger in a Land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years, and also that Nation whom they shall serve, will I judge, and afterwards shall they come out with great substance,* Gen. 15. 13, 14. When men do not understand the work of God in their day, then they censure, and arraign, and condemn that wisdom and power, that love and grace, that goodness and mercy, that is moving towards them, and breaking in upon them. God can do whatsoever he pleaseth, and he will do whatsoever he hath promised.

Sometimes men leave the work of God, and forsake it, and turn their backs upon it, after they have been ingaged in it. So did the Children of *Israel* when they were in the Wilderness of *Paran.* God had taken them out of the Iron Furnace, and had brought them up from the House of Bondage, and saved them from the Swords of the *Egyptians*, and seal'd his truth to them by Miracles and Wonders in the Wilderness as they past along. *And now they being come near* Canaan, *the Lord commanded them by* Moses, *to go in and possess that good Land, a Land that flowed with Milk and Honey, the glorious Land, and the glory of all Lands.* And this was the work of God in that day, but they rebelled against the Lord, and would not hearken unto his voice. *And all the Children of* Israel *murmured against* Moses, *and against* Aaron: *and the whole Congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the Land of* Egypt, *or would God we had died in this Wilderness; and wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this Land, to fall by the Sword, that our Wives and our Children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into* Egypt? *And they said one to another, Let us make a Captain, and let us return into* Egypt, *Numb.* 14. 2, 3, 4. You see here they were for *Egypt*, and not *Canaan*: For

Numb. 13. 26.

Ezek. 20. 6.

For a new Captain to lead them, and not *Moses*: For Bondage and Slavery, and not Liberty and Freedom: And God Almighty took them at their word. *As truly as I live saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine Ears, so will I do to you. Your Carcases shall fall in this Wilderness, and all that were numbred of you, according to your whole number from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against me, verse* 28, 29. Their *Egypt* was the Wilderness, their Captain was their punishment, and forty years was the time of their misery. *But with many of them God was not well-pleased, for they were overthrown in the Wilderness.* 1 Cor. 10. 5. They that will not hear the word of God that is spoken to them, shall feel the wrath of God that is spoken of them. There is a way of flying to God, but there is no way of flying from God.

Sometimes men despise the work of God, and look upon it as a very small thing, not worthy of their acceptance; this did the *Jews* that were in Captivity, which *Nebuchadnezzar* had carried away from the land of *Judea* to *Babylon*. *And after they had been there threescore and ten years, the Lord stirred up the spirit of* Cyrus *King of* Persia, *that he made a Proclamation throughout all his Kingdom, and put it also in Writing, saying. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to* Jerusalem *which is in* Judah, *and Build the House of the Lord God of* Israel, *he is the God which is in* Jerusalem. *And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth let the men of his place help him with Silver, and with Gold, and with Goods, and with Beasts, besides the Free-will Offering for the House of God that is in* Jerusalem, *Ezra* 1. 1, 3, 4. 2 Chron. 36. 21.

Now what did these *Jews* do after they had seen the Kings Proclamation, which was so full of Love and Goodness? Did they go up to *Jerusalem*, and Build the House of God? Their Yokes were now broken, their Bands were loosed, their heavy Burdens were removed, Liberty was proclaimed, a Door was opened of Mercy and Grace, the Call of God was clear, the Work of God was great and glorious. *Some of them did go up.* They were only them whose spirits God had rais'd. Ezra 7. 7. Ezra 1. 5.

rais'd to go up; but the most of them did not, as appear'd afterwards by *Haman*'s Plot, *Esther* 3. 8, 9. *And* Haman *said unto King* Ahasuerus, *there is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispers'd among the people, in all the Provinces of thy Kingdom, and their Laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the Kings Laws; therefore it is not for the Kings profit to suffer them. If it please the King let it be written that they may be destroy'd, and I will pay ten Thousand Talents of Silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business.* How sad is it then not to follow the call of God? These *Jews* lookt upon the Way up to *Jerusalem* to be long, the Journey dangerous, the Success doubtful, the King a Heathen, the Enemy there before, and therefore they despised the work of God, and prefer'd their ease before glory, and bondage before freedom, and their little concerns before the great and glorious work of God. They chose rather to dwell amongst the Heathens, and to see their abominable Idolatry, than to go up with their Brethren to *Jerusalem* to worship the Lord. When men take their measures from their fears, and jealousies, and not from the word of God, and his providences: When men consult with Flesh and Blood, and not the duty of their places, and the work of God that lyes before them: When men lean to their own understandings, and reject the counsel of God: When men rely upon an Arm of Flesh, and not upon the mighty God of *Jacob*; then they do despise the work of God in their day, and cry it down, and endeavour to bring an evil report upon it, saying, Ah, this is not the time, this is not the way, these are not fit instruments to be imploy'd. O vain man, know and consider, that Gods power is irresistible, his wisdom unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. Sin at the first was the cause of all ignorance, but now ignorance is the cause of all sin. Our work below is then the best done, when our work above is the first done.

Sometimes men resist the work of God, and oppose it in their day, and seek to overthrow it. This the persecuting *Jews* did in the days of our Saviour, and in the days of the Apostles. *For this*
Acts 5. 39. *man doth many Miracles; if we let this man alone, all men will believe*

on

on him, and the Romans *shall come and take away both our place and nation, John* 11. 47, 48. These words were spoken in Counsel, and the design of them was to overthrow the work of God, to persecute Christ Jesus to death, and his faithful Witnesses. *Then from that day forth they took Counsel together for to put him to death, verse* 53. he came and preached peace to them, but they proclaimed War against him. He came to his own, but they received him not. He came to heal them, but they wounded him. He came to save them, but they killed him. He was full of love, grace, and truth, but they were filled with rage, malice, prejudice, and unbelief. They clipped the wings of his mercy, and clogged the wheels of his love and kindness. They shut up the treasures of his grace against themselves, and held the hand of his power by their unbelief. *And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief, Matth.* 13. 58. That which the unbelieving *Jews* said then, the unbelieving *Gentiles* say now. We will not have this man to reign over us. Sin and Satan shall reign, the Law and the Letter shall reign: But he that is Lord of life, and gives life, shall not reign over us. The ways and methods that the *Jews* took to keep the *Romans* out, brought the *Romans* in upon them. For they persecuted Gods Faithful Servants, and commanded them not to preach the Gospel, not to speak in his name, and that brought the wrath of God upon them. *Forbidding us to speak to the* Gentiles, *that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: For the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost,* 1 *Thess* 2. 16. When men take evil ways to save themselves from the evil they fear, that may come and may not come, it is the ready way to bring that evil upon them they fear. *Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of it self: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, Matth.* 6. 34. When we make God our refuge, and strength, then he makes Heaven our inheritance, and the Earth our passage to that glorious inheritance.

I have in the first place shew'd you what was done heretofore by the Jews, and what that work of God was in their days;

days; *For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope, Romans* 15.4. And now in the second place I shall shew you, what that work of God is in our day, that you that know may know more, and do the things that are Just, and best for your selves, and others. This then is a two-fold work.

1. A Salvation Work.
2. A Generation Work.

1. First a Salvation Work. *Work out your Salvation with fear and trembling, Phil.* 2.12. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh wherein no man can work, John* 9.4. Death is a work, but wants to be done. the doing of it well then, will require now our utmost endeavours, our greatest diligence, our always abounding in the work of the Lord, a considering of our ways, a right ordering of our conversations, a running the race that is set before us, a striving to enter in at the strait gate, a giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure, a growing in grace, and a laying up a good foundation against the time to come, and a labouring for that bread that perisheth not. O consider this, that Heaven, and Hell, will divide between them all the people that are now living upon the earth in a little time; every man must shoot the Gulf of Eternity at Death, and then another Gulf will be fixed. *And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you, cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence, Luke* 16.26. They that dye in their sins, God will never return to them to shew mercy, and they shall never return to him to receive mercy. O work therefore while it is called to day, the day of mercy is yet continued, and the day of grace is not yet ended: he that will dye but once, must dye daily: he that will be delivered from the second Death, must have a part in the first Resurrection: He that will be equal with Saints in Glory, must be eminent with Saints in Grace. No Souls can live with God in Heaven, but such in whom the Spirit of God

lived

lived whiles they were on Earth. They that neglect the work of their Salvation, cannot escape the punishment of their Damnation. *How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation? Heb.* 2. 3. This is the work that every man should most pursue, and that early, and not to refer it, and put it off to a dying hour. O how unfit a time is that for so great a work? Often-times Mens Speech is taken from them, they would speak, but cannot; sometimes their reason is taken from them, they are light-headed, and speak they know not what; surely that is not a proper season for men to make their peace with God. Can any man think that God Almighty will be so soon reconcil'd to him, that hath lived a sinful wicked life all his days, when he lyes on his death bed, under the weight of all his sins when wrath is in his bosom, and vengeance at his back? I was told lately of a rich man, that spake these words on his bed, a little before he dyed; *I have left thousands for this Child, and thousands for that Child, but I have no treasures laid up for my self in Heaven. To make them Rich, I have made my self Poor: to make them great, I have made my self miserable; and now my poor Soul is left to shift for it self, what will become of it I know not.* O is not this the sad state and condition of many a Rich Man when he comes to dye? A great man may enjoy much, and yet he wants more than he enjoys; he wants the favour of God, an interest in Jesus Christ, and that joy of the holy Ghost which is unspeakable, and full of glory, and that love of God, which is better than life, and that grace which is sufficient, and assurance of that glory which God hath promised, and Christ hath purchased. *O work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.* When once the Master of the House is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, *Lord, Lord open unto us, and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are. Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. Luke* 13. 25, 26, 27. O be therefore traders for heaven, that God may be your portion, Christ your gain, Heaven your home, and Glory your reward. *This then is the work of your Salvation to continue in well-doing, seeking for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, and Eternal Life: But Glory, Honour and Peace to every one,* Rom. 2. 7.

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ver. 10, 11. *that worketh good. For there is no respect of persons with God.*

Secondly, A Generation Work. And you will say, What is that? Have you not known, have you not heard, has it not been told you? God Almighty hath spoken to these Nations from Heaven, by his mighty works which we have all seen: and the Trumpet of his providences hath sounded this truth aloud in our ears: *To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every Yoke, Isaiah* 58. 6.

Who is there amongst us, that hath not heard this voice? The King that sits upon the Throne hath spoken to us, by his late gracious Declaration for Liberty of Conscience. *Gamaliel* by one argument silenced a whole assembly of persecutors, that had agreed to slay the Holy Apostles. *And they took Counsel together to slay them, Acts* 5. 33. *Gamaliels* argument was this: *Now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God, verse* 38, 39. Now the King by his gracious Declaration hath done much more, for he hath silenced all the persecutors in three Kingdoms, and tyed up their hands, that they cannot smite with the fist of wickedness: Many Thousands of Gods people in these Kingdoms have spoken also to you, by the many humble addresses they presented to the King, blessing God, and thanking the King for this Liberty of Conscience which they now enjoy. Persecution is a thing so ill in its nature, so black in its name, so bad in its effects and consequences, so displeasing to God, so hurtful to a Kingdom, and so destructive to trade, that modesty it self might restrain men from that hellish and devilish work, though they had nothing of Christianity in them: and this will appear farther, because, *Blessed are they, which are persecuted for Righteousness sake for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, Matth.* 5. 10. Now if they be blessed, that are persecuted, then they that persecute are cursed. If Heaven be the reward of faithful sufferers for Conscience sake towards God, then Hell will be

be the portion of persecutors. If persecution be a thing so evil and bad, let us consider then what these Penal Laws and Tests are; and what they have done, or has been done by them. 2 Thes. 1. 6.

1. First then, These Penal Laws have arm'd your Enemies, and put Weapons into their Hands to destroy you that are Dissenters. When you were in the hands of your persecutors, they neither pity'd you, nor spar'd you; but broke open your Doors, and entered into your Houses, taking away your Money and Goods, and at some places not leaving the Poor People a Bed to lye on, nor a Stool to sit on: forcing you to attend from Sessions to Sessions, and from Assize to Assize, still keeping them bound over, and putting many into Prison, and there keeping them long, and some so long till they dy'd. And at that time they told you, that it was not they that spoil'd you of your goods, but the Laws: it was not they that shut you up in Prison, but the Laws: it was not they that punish'd and destroy'd you for your Consciences towards God, but the Laws. This was that persecutors said then, and this is that they say now, it was the Laws that destroyed you, and not them. The King by his Declaration hath put Violence out of their Hands, that they cannot hurt you; and do you pray to God that he might put Violence out of their Hearts, that they may not hate you; and take hold of this opportunity that God hath put into your Hands, by all Just and Lawful means, that those Laws may be destroy'd, that have destroy'd so many people. This makes men bold to commit the greatest wickedness, when they have Laws to encourage them, and bear them out. This said the *Jews* that Murdered our Lord and Saviour, *We have a Law, and by our Law he ought to dye.* And this was the thing that cast *Daniel* into the Den of Lyons, namely *the Law of the Medes and Persians.* And this was that encourag'd *Haman* to contrive the destruction and ruin of so many thousand *Jews* at once; *The Law being on his side, and against them.* And this is that the Prophet *Micah* complain'd of, *That the Statutes of* Omri *were kept up, and all the works of the house of* Ahab, *Micah* 6. 16.

John 19. 7. Dan. 6. 15. Esther 3. 8.

Now if the Penal Laws be so hurtful, who then can plead for their continuance?

2. Secondly these Penal Laws have given great encouragement to the Informers: Good men will not labour for nothing, and bad men will stick at nothing: All is Fish that comes to their Net, and they will Fish though they catch the Devil, and their own damnation together: These Laws allowing the Informer a third part of the money that is got from the people, that go to quiet and peaceable Meetings, there to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. *Judas* for the love of thirty pieces of silver sold his Lord and Master into the hands of Betrayers and Murderers. *Ahasuerus* to gain ten thousand Talents of silver consented, and commanded that the best people in all his Kingdom should be destroy'd by cruel and bloody hands. *Achan* to purchase a Wedge of Gold, and some silver, brought upon himself and Family destruction; and troubled, and disquieted all *Israel*. By this you may see what men will do, when there is money in the case: These Penal Laws did set a great many hands at work, but none were so industrious as the Informers, for that sort of Vermine crawl'd up and down every where, and were a plague to all people wherever they came; hunting and searching up and down to find out Meetings, that they might prey upon the people, and get what money they could from them: And this was their Trade to set up a work-house for Hell. Now when the Penal Statutes are taken away, this Trade will be for ever destroy'd. Who will plead for these Penal Laws that they may be kept up? surely none, but they that had a hand in robbing and spoiling their poor Neighbours. In the sense of the Apostle *John*, *Whosoever hateth his Brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* You may see by this Text who are the Murderers: And if men shall be sent away with a Curse into Everlasting Fire for not relieving and comforting the People of God, when they were in distress, and sought unto them that were full, and rich, but they had no bowels of compassion in them: What do you think will become of them at that day, that have robb'd and spoil'd the

Matth. 26. 14, 15.

Esth. 3. 9, 13.

1. Joh. 5. 15.

the People of God in this day? Oh that such men would give glory to God by Repentance, and satisfaction to their poor Neighbours by an acknowledgment to them of the wrong they have done them.

3. The third Reason why these Penal Laws ought to be taken away, is this; because they have destroy'd Religion, and open'd a door to let in Debauchery and Prophaneness upon the People of these Lands; the sad effects of which we see at this day. Religion is the glory of a People, the interest of a Kingdom, and that which exalts a Nation. Now that which destroys religious men, destroys Religion: but that these Penal Laws have destroyed great numbers of religious People since they were made, is evident and plain to all that know any thing: These Penal Statutes have been the Fiery Serpents that have stung and bit the People of God as they past on their way through this Wilderness to the heavenly *Canaan*. These have been the Thorns in their sides, that have prick'd and scratch'd many: These have been a Yoke, which neither us, nor our Fore-fathers were able to bear. Because that *Amalek* fell upon God's *Israel*, as they past along in the way, God commanded *Moses* to *write this for a memorial in a Book, and rehearse it in the ears of* Joshua; *for I will utterly put out the remembrance of* Amalek *from under Heaven*, *Exod* 17. 14. King *Saul* had a commission from God to do this work; *Go and smite* Amalek, *and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both Man and Woman, Infant and Suckling, Ox and Sheep, Camel and Ass:* But *Saul* did not do this work so fully, as God had commanded him, and therefore he lost two Kingdoms, an earthly Kingdom, and an heavenly Kingdom; first his Life, and then his Soul, 1 *Sam.* 15. 3, 23, 26, 28. Persecutors are but one people in all Ages; they rise up in the Spirit of *Cain*, and allow of the deeds of their Fore-fathers; and are the Children of them which have killed the Prophets, and are guilty of all the righteous blood-shed upon the Earth, from the blood of righteous *Abel*, unto the blood of the last murdered Saint. This blood hath cryed long, and loud for vengeance on Persecutors, and God Almighty,

Prov. 14. 34.

Numb. 21. 6.

Almighty will give a full, and speedy answer to it; this will be but a bad plea for Men, when they shall appear before Almighty God, nor but little comfort to them in this world, when they are on a sick Bed, that they had Laws for what they did. For if a Law be sinful, and bad, as these Penal Laws are, this will not bear a man out. The Jews were under Righteous Laws, and yet wicked: But these men have destroy'd the Righteous by Wicked Laws: Destroy'd them in their Estates, destroy'd them in their Liberties, destroy'd them in their Relations, and destroy'd many in their Lives: By this you may see what these Penal Laws are. O let all good Men say of these Penal Laws, as *Samuel* said to *Agag*; *And* Samuel *said, As thy Sword hath made Women childless, so shall thy Mother be childless among Women*, 1 *Sam.* 15. 33.

4. Fourthly, These Laws which are called Penal Laws, have destroyed Liberty, and Property: that which was spoken by the Prophet *Joel*, concerning the Caterpillers, and Locusts, and Palmer-Worms, and Canker-Worms, the same may be said of these Penal Laws: *That which the Palmer-Worm hath left, hath the Locust eaten, and that which the Locust hath left, hath the Canker-Worm eaten, and that which the Canker-Worm hath left, hath the Caterpiller eaten*, *Joel* 1. 4. Now this was a Judgment that was upon the Land, and a Plague upon the People of *Israel*: all this may be truly apply'd to the case in hand; for what one Law left, the other took, and amongst them swept away all that the people had; that of twenty pound a month took away their Property, and for not coming to the Sacrament they lost their Liberty by another Law, and a third shut them up in Prison during Life, and a fourth if they would not abjure, and leave the Land, then they were to be hang'd up as Felons. These were your Penal Statutes, that were then put in force and execution against you; are these Statutes fit to be kept up now, think you? Where is the man that would be impos'd upon himself, and forc'd, and compell'd? where is the man that would be persecuted, and oppress'd, and robb'd of his Liberty, and

and Property? Every man values that at a high rate, and all partys are for Liberty; every man is for Liberty for himself, and his own party, though he will not allow it to others: now if all men would but walk by this rule, do as they would be done by, do as they would have others do unto them, mete that measure to others as they would have others to mete unto them, and to love their Neighbours as themselves; for upon this hangs the Law, and the Prophets, it is a fulfilling the Law: *For the Law is fulfil'd in one word, even in this, thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*, Gal. 5. 14. If men did but duely observe, and keep this, then they would not be so fond, and desirous to keep up compelling, and persecuting Laws.

But I proceed to the fifth, and that is this:

5. That these Penal Laws have destroyed Love and Charity among Men; a thing much to be desired, and highly to be valued. When these Laws lay asleep, and were not put in force, how peaceably and quietly did one Neighbour live by another, how sweetly and friendly did one man converse with each other? But no sooner did that Brat of Hell, and of the Devil (Persecution) come amongst us, but it put the whole Nation in a flame, like *Sampson*'s Foxes that did set all on fire they came near; then it was nothing but Whig and Tory, Trimmer and Papist in Masquerade: And in this firmentation was the Nation in, till the King's Gracious Declaration for Liberty of Conscience, came forth flying amongst us: That quench'd, and put out these fires, that the Penal Laws had kindled: It brought peace to them that were in trouble, ease to them that were weary, and relief to them that were in distress: It loosed the bands of them that were bound over, and open'd the Prison doors to them that were shut up, and sent Labourers into the Lord's Vineyard that stood still; it put violence out of the hands of them that destroy'd, and it filled the hearts of many with joy, and their mouths with praises and thanksgiving: First to God Almighty, and then to the King, for his great Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, Goodness and Kindness towards his poor Subjects.

Judg. 15. 4, 5.

Subjects. The good effects of this all good men see, and rejoyce in. Now if these Penal Laws were the great Make-bate amongst the People, then the taking of them away will slay that enmity, and bury all these reproachful names, and terms, that men have cast upon one another.

6. In the sixth place, Persecution is that which discourageth Trade, and greatly destroys it: It was that which brought the Trade into *England*, and it is that which will carry the Trade out of *England*. The Persecution that was heretofore in other Lands, made the Trading-people flie over into these Lands, who shewed the people here, the way of making these Manufactures, that are now made in such abundance, and have proved so profitable and beneficial to these Kingdoms: This is so well known, that it cannot be denyed. Now the same way that brought the Trade to us, will certainly carry it from us. When these Penal Laws were put in force, did not many Trades-men leave the Land, and Merchants, and others in several Cities in this Kingdom did leave their habitations, and were forced to remove to other places, because of the Persecution that was then? This is well known to most men. Now as Righteousness exalts a Nation, so Trade enricheth a Nation. A proof of this you may see, if you look over into *Holland*, they granting Liberty of Conscience to all Persuasions; this brought them a Trade, and that Trade hath made them so great, and rich, that as it were from a small Worm, they are become a great Mountain, and from being Poor Distressed States, they now call themselves the High and Mighty; from begging, and craving help of others to support them, their Trade hath so supported them, and encreased their wealth and strength, that they strive to grasp the Trade of Nations into their own hands: Now all these blessings they suck'd from the Breast of Liberty of Conscience. Trade is a great part of the glory of a Nation: It fills the King's Coffers with Treasure (the Custom being one of the Jewels of his Crown:) It encreaseth Merchants, and makes them great: It enricheth the Shopkeepers, and makes them wealthy: It encourageth Shipping, and Navigation, that carries out the Manufactures of *England*, and returns with rich Commodities, and

and with Gold, and Silver: It sets thousands of hands at work, and imploys the poor of the Land; it encourageth Strangers, and Forreigners to come and dwell amongst us, to shew us their art and skill: It advanceth the price of Land, that the Nobles, and Gentry have so great a part of. This shews the great advantage of Trade, that extends its benefits to every man. Now they that are for the keeping up of the Penal Statutes, are not the Friends of the Common-wealth, but Enemies to Trade, because they are for Persecution. Now he that runs may read, and he that reads may see the evil of these Penal Laws.

I shall now come to the Objections that are usually made against the taking away of these Laws, and answer them. The first Objection is this: Do you think that this Liberty and Toleration which you now enjoy, is granted and given to you in love and kindness; is it not to serve a turn, and to bring about another thing? Now my answer to this Objection is this; If this work be of God, then it is in love and kindness to the Dissenters: But this work is of God, as will appear to all men, that do but consider well these three things, that is, the time, the way, and the effects. First then of the time; when this King came to the Crown, what were mens thoughts then? The Sufferers they thought, that their condition would have been worse; the Persecutors they thought that their Trade would have been better: The Sufferers they did not expect to have enjoyed that which they now enjoy; it was above their Faith, and beyond their hopes. The Persecutors they did not believe, nor fear, that they should have seen, and beheld the things they now see. This great disappointment hath filled the one with joy and gladness, and the other with rage and madness. God hath overtaken his People with preventing mercies, and hath reproved his enemies in the way; he hath opened the mouths of his people to bless God, and the King for this Liberty granted to them, and hath tyed up the hands of Persecutors, and this makes them blaspheme. O let men praise the Lord for his wondrous works, and let them know that the most High God doth whatsoever he pleaseth in the Kingdoms of men, Psal. 135.6.

2. Of the way; other Kings have given Liberty of Conscience to their Subjects, because they were of their persuasions; but this King gives Liberty of Conscience to all his Protestant Subjects, though himself be of another persuasion; and in this he out-shines in glory all the Crowned Heads that were before him. The King thinks that our perswasion is the wrong, and we believe that his is not the right, nevertheless this does not lessen his Power, and Authority over us, nor diminish our Duty and Obedience to him. God hath put this into the Heart of the King, that all the Yokes, and Bonds, and Burthens, that have been laid upon Conscience, or on men for their Conscience sake towards God, in the former Reigns to be broken, and for ever removed. Is not this a wonderful work of God, to have all this done at once, which could never be done before, and we have reason to think that it would never have been done by any Prince but this? O let no man say, that there is a new King risen up that knew not *Joseph*, or that there is a *Joseph* in the Land, that will not know *Pharaoh*. O let this Liberty be thankfully received, and wisely improv'd, that Gods glory may be advanced, that the Justice, wisdom, kindness, and goodness of the King may be acknowledged, as the great instrument in the hand of God, in a work so great and good as this is towards his People.

3. Of the effects, no man can say now in this our *Israel*, that the Gates of Liberty are shut up against him: *The Righteous Nation that keeps the truth may now enter in.* No man can say now in these Kingdoms, *That the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence.* Every Man may now enter into it that will. No Man can say now in City, or Countrey, that the evil Angels hold the Winds, that they cannot blow, that is, Persecutors: Every Man may now sit under the breathings of Gods Spirit in the Ministry of the Word, and serve him without fear. Many hundreds have been let out of Prison, that were before shut up: many thousands that were before troubled and prosecuted, are now quiet, and in peace: many hundreds are now Labouring in the Lords Vineyard, preaching the Word of God up and down every where, and there be many thousands of

Isa. 26. 2.

Mat. 23.13.

Rev. 7. 1.

of Souls, that do attend and hear the Word of God preached to them. Have not many thousands of the People in these Nations own'd, and acknowledged this to be the Work of God in their Addresses to the King? Now by all this you may see, that it is the work of God, then it is in love and kindness to the Dissenters; let this then serve for an Answer to this Objection.

The second Objection is: If these Penal Laws should be taken away, then Popery will come in upon us. By this Objection then I perceive the thing that you fear, is the coming in of Popery, and the way that you will take to keep it out, is to continue the Penal Laws: Now this being an evil way, may bring that evil upon you which you fear: This evil way the Israelites of old did take when they were afraid of the Canaanites: *And they said one to another, Let us make a Captain, and let us return into Egypt.* Now this being an evil way, brought that evil upon them which they feared; *Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.* This evil way did King *Saul* take when he was afraid of the *Philistines: Then said* Saul *unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar Spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her; and his servants said unto him, Behold there is a woman that hath a familiar Spirit at* Endor. Now this being an evil way, brought that evil upon him and his Sons which he feared. *So* Saul *died, and his three Sons, and his Armour-bearer, and all his Men that same day together,* 1 *Sam.* 31. 4, 5, 6. This was the evil way that King *Zedekiah* did take, when he was afraid of the *Chaldæans*, he would not hearken to the word of the Lord by *Jeremiah* the Prophet; *But he fled, and went forth out of the City by night, by the way of the King's Gardens, by the Gate betwixt two walls, and he went out the way of the Plain, Jer.* 39. 4. This being an evil way, did bring upon him and his house all that evil which he feared. *Then the King of* Babylon *slew the Sons of* Zedekiah *before his eyes in* Riblah, *and he slew all the Nobles of* Judah, *and he put out* Zedekiahs *eyes, and bound him in Chains, to carry him to* Babylon, *Jer.* 39. 6. 7. This evil way did the *Jews* take in the days of our Saviour, and in the days of the Apostles, when they were afraid of the *Romans. The* Romans

Numb. 13. 28. *to* 33.
Num. 14. 4. Verse 29. 1 Cor. 10.
1 Sam. 28. 5, 8, 9. Verse 7.
Jer. 38. 19, 20.
John 11. 48.

mans *shall come, and take away both our Place and Nation.* To save themselves from the *Romans*, they kept up Persecution, and did
Mat. 23 35. slay Gods faithful Witnesses, and were betrayers and murderers,
Acts 7. 32. and did endeavour to overthrow the work of God, and the faith of the Gospel. Now this being an evil way also, brought
Luke 21 6, all that evil upon them which they feared. And are you still
26. for the keeping up of compelling and persecuting Laws, because you are afraid of Popery? Is this the way to keep it out? Never yet did any people take an evil way to save themselves from the evil they feared, but it brought it upon them. I have here shewed you this at large, and I have also shewed you the evil of these Penal Laws: Take heed therefore lest you bring upon your selves that evil which hath befaln others; you must not keep up that which is bad for fear of worse, you must not do evil that good may come of it, you must not commit sin to keep out Popery, you must not keep mens Consciences in Chains for ever, that is the work of the next World, and not this; the Gospel will not allow that any man should suffer in his Body, or in his Estate, by persecuting Laws, for the errors of his mind, nor that any man should forfeit his Free-hold for being of a wrong perswasion. He that spake as never man spake, said, *Let the Wheat and the Tares grow both together until the Harvest*, Mat.
Mat. 15 13. 13. 30. It is Gods work to pull up, the Spirits work to con-
John 16. 8. vince, it is mans work to perswade by sound arguments, and
2 Cor. 5. 11. to allure by a good Conversation men from a bad Religion to a better, and from a wrong Religion to the right. A man does not believe as others believe, and cannot believe as others would have him believe, but he believes as he sees cause to believe. The question then is not so much what hath been done, nor what some men would have to be done, but what is best to be done to keep out Popery, for that is your fear. If I should give you counsel will you hearken to it, and if I give you advice will you take it?

First then if you will keep out Popery, do you *amend your*
Jer. 7. 3. *ways and your doings, and turn unto the Lord by a true and sincere repentance.* You have heard of the Judgments of God which have been abroad in other Lands, and you have been told of the

the Judgments of God at home in this Land; but these past Judgments have not humbled you, nor your present Mercies have not drawn you, nor led you to the God of your Mercies. Do you look like a people brought forth in a day of light? do you look like a people that have lived in a Land of knowledge? do you look like a people that have sat under the preaching of the Gospel, and have enjoyed the means of grace so long? Were ever mens mouths so full of Cursing and Swearing, and Blaspheming as now? were ever mens hearts so full of Wrath and Rage, Enmity and Hatred against God, and against his holy ways as now? were ever mens lives so full of Unrighteousness and Ungodliness, and all Wickedness whatsoever, as they are now? Did ever Pride so reign in *England*, and Drunkenness so abound, Murders so frequent, and Whoring as it were a Staple Trade? were ever people so Debauched and Prophane as they are now? What do you think will become of such a people? *Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience, Eph.* 5. 6. O let the cry of your Prayers out-cry the cry of your sins, that your tears may quench that fire which your sins have kindled: And be not out-done by Heathens; Remember what *Nineveh* did: *If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their Land,* 2 *Chron*, 7. 14. When the *Jews* had so provoked the Lord God by their sins and wickedness, their Ark then could not save them, nor their Temple could not then preserve them, but swift destruction came upon them. O break off your sins by repentance, and your iniquities by bringing forth fruits of righteousness, that every man may live in Piety towards God, in Loyalty towards his Prince, and in Love and Charity one towards another. The exercising so many cruelties upon Dissenters heretofore, and of late years, by pernicious Laws hath opened a door to let in Debauchery upon the people of this Land.

2. Secondly if you will keep out Popery, then let the Clergy of this Land keep out Lazinesse and Idleness, Drunkenness and Pride,

Pride, Covetousness and Ambition, and Superstition out of their Tribe, that they may be shining and burning lights amongst the people, and not like the idle Shepherds of old, nor like the greedy and covetous Priests that look'd for their gain from their quarter, *Isa.* 56. 11. Nor like the Hireling that flies from the Sheep when the Wolf comes, but to be valiant for the truth, labouring in Word and Doctrine, taking all opportunities to Preach the Word of God in Season, and out of Season, to the people, with all Authority, with all Sincerity, with all Affection, with all Humility and Plainness; rightly dividing the Word of Truth, and wisely applying it to the Consciences of their Hearers; convincing men by sound Arguments drawn from the Scriptures of Truth, and alluring men by their good Examples and heavenly Conversations, that they may adorn the Gospel of Christ, Praying without ceasing, Fasting often, Watching diligently over their Flocks, that they may save themselves and them that hear them.

Joh. 10. 12.

1. First, Let them consider the End of Preaching, which is to enlighten men in the truth, and to build them up in the most holy Faith, *That they may be turned from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God*, that the bad may be made good, and that the good may be made better, and they that are without, may be brought in, and they that are within may be built up, and encrease in grace.

Acts 26. 18.

2. Secondly, Let them consider the message they are to declare to the People, which was from the beginning, *That God is light, and love, and in him is no darkness at all. Behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the Sons of God*, John 3. 1. *But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*, Rom. 5. 8. *For God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* John 3. 16. *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own bloud. Rev.* 1. 5. The Message then is love, the love of God to men on earth, Peace and good Will; this love is shed abroad in the Heart, this love draws men to God,

1 Joh. 1. 5.

God, and keeps them with him, and carrys them to him. O what a blessed subject is the love of God for Men to dwell upon! Rom. 8.35.

3. Thirdly, Let them consider the Charge that is committed to their care, to oversee the Souls of so many thousands of Men and Women, that do hear them, and will hear none but them in this Kingdom. *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God, take heed therefore unto your selves, and unto all the flock, over which the holy Ghost hath made you overseers. Acts* 20. 26, 27, 28. See Ezek. 3. 20.

4. Fourthly, Let them consider of that Account they must give to God almighty hereafter; *Who shall give Account to him that is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead.* 1 Peter 4. 5. *So then every one of us shall give Account of himself to God,* Rom. 14.12. *But I keep under my Body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have Preached to others, I my self should be a cast-away.* 1 *Cor.* 9. 27. O let these things be well considered of by the Clergy-men, if they have been in the wrong heretofore, that they may be in the right now. In some things we offend in all, in all things we offend in some; if this be not regarded, by them, it will be a witness against them; the less of the wisdom of man that is seen in it, the more of the power of God may appear by it.

Thirdly, If you will keep out Popery when it shall please the King to call a Parliament, that you do then chuse such men for your Representatives, that may perfect this good work the King hath begun, for Liberty of Conscience, chuse men that have a good affection for the Kings gracious Declaration, Men of Wisdom and Understanding, Men of good Lives and Conversations, Men that have a high value for Religion, and a true love for their Countrey, Men that have lived peaceably, and quietly amongst their Neighbours, that are not of a Persecuting Spirit. The King hath been graciously pleased to offer that to his People, that is so great, and the way of doing it so Just, that

that no Prince can offer better, and no People can desire more. The thing the King offers is Liberty, Liberty of Conscience, the free exercise of every mans Conscience towards God; a thing that hath been so much desired, a thing that is so highly valued, a thing so well pleasing to God, and so acceptable with Men, a thing that hath made Nations great and happy, that this Liberty of Conscience which we all enjoy may be so secured to all by such a Law, that it may not be in the power of any that shall come after to alter that settlement, nor destroy that security. Now the way the King offers this is in your own way, in a Parliamentary way, and can there be any thing more Just than this, that by them these Penal Laws and Tests may be taken away, and that by them such a Law may be made, as may secure Liberty of Conscience to every Man, that it may not be in the power of any one party to hurt the rest for the exercising of their Consciences towards God in his worship. Did ever Liberty of Conscience hurt any Nation? or did ever Liberty of Conscience destroy Religion? Have not the benefits & blessings been ever great that have flowed from it, as I have fully proved before? Notwithstanding all this, some oppose this good work, others do discourage it, and some do not understand it: under these many difficulties doth Liberty of Conscience struggle at this day, and wants strength to be brought forth. The King hath put his Royal Hand to this good work, and he expects that his Subjects should put their Hands to it also; that when a Parliament shall be called, and come together, they may compleat it, and perfect it. If any shall say, as *Nicodemus*, *How can these things be?* I answer, that which hath been done may be done, now this hath been done by Heathens themselves. *Now O King establish the decree and sign the writing, that it may not be changed according to the Law of the* Medes *and* Persians *which altereth not. Dan. 6. 8. Then they came near, and spake before the King concerning the Kings Decree, Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or Man within Thirty days save of thee, O King, shall be cast into the Den of Lyons? The King answered and said, the thing is true according to the Law of the* Medes *and* Persians *which altereth not, verse* 12. *Then the King when he heard these words, was sore*

John 3. 9.

sore displeased with himself, and set his Heart on Daniel *to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the Sun to deliver him. verse* 14. Here was a Law made that could not be changed, nor altered, they that made it would not do it, and the King that signed it could not do it, though he laboured till the going down of the Sun. This was done by Heathens, surely Christians can do much more.

And was there not a Law made in *England* heretofore, that you call *Magna Charta*, and notwithstanding the many Changes, and Alterations, that have been in this Kingdom since that, is that Law changed or altered? The People of this Kingdom heretofore, have been in great confusions, and in great distraction under many Calamities, and Judgments; in War, and Blood, in Flames, and Persecutions, yet *Magna Charta* hath remained, and doth still; why then may there not be a *Magna Charta* for Liberty, as well as there is for Property?

Fourthly, If you will keep out Popery, then you must keep out slavish fear, and groundless Jealousys and unbelief out of your hearts, and minds. Fear God and keep his commandments, trust in the Lord for ever, *For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength: Isaiah 26. 4. The Lord God is a Wall of Fire, round about his People, and the glory in the midst of them, Zachary. chap. 2. v. 5.* And if there were as many Enemies as there be Sands in the Sea, they could not break through this Wall to hurt you. *What shall one then answer the Messengers of the Nation? That the Lord hath founded* Zion, *and the poor of his People shall trust in it, Isa. 14. 32.* God hath builded his church upon a Rock, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. Can men measure the Flames, can men bundle up the Air, can men turn the earth into a lump of Gold? They may as soon do this, as prevail against Gods Church. Look into the Days of the Apostles, the Church of God in that day had no Emperours nor Kings to protect it, nor humane Laws to support it, nor Carnal Weapons to defend it, they had no Armies to guard them, nor to fight their Battles, but both *Jews*, and *Gentiles* were against them. *But the unbelieving* Jews *stirred up the* Gentiles, *and made their minds evil affected against the Brethren, and there was an assault made both of the* Gentiles *and also of the* Jews, *with their Rulers, to use them* Mat. 16. 18.

 despitefully

Acts 7. 52. *despitefully, and to stone them. Acts* 14. 2, 5. *yet in all this, they were more than Conquerours.* The great *Diana* of the *Gentiles* fell down
Acts 19. 28. before them, and the Temple worship of the *Jews* came to nought.
Heb. 11. 33. *By the Shield of Faith they subdued Kingdoms*, and by the Sword of the Spirit they conquered Nations. *For the Weapons of our Warfare, are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth it self against the knowledge of God.* 2 *Cor.* 10. 4, 5. I need not tell you what men have done, I cannot tell you what men will do; but I can tell you what men cannot do: *Behold I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it, Rev.* 3. 8. No man can shut the door of Faith, the door of hope, the door of Gos-
Acts 5. 39. pel grace, that God hath set open, no man can overthrow that work, which God hath begun, and hath been carrying on in these Nations. *The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the World is gone after him, Acts* 12. 19. No man can bring any evil upon you, that God cannot prevent, nor hinder that good from you, that God hath promised to you. No man can take from you that Joy that God gives to you, Joy unspeakable and full of Glory; *and your Joy no man taketh from you, John* 16. 22. No man can hinder the fulfilling of Gods word, the accomplishment of the prophecies, *and the finishing of the mystery of God, as he hath declared to his Servants the Prophets, Rev.* 10. 7. No man can hinder the working of Providences, which God doth exercise in the Government of the World, for the good of his People. No man can hinder the increase of grace here, nor the reward of glory hereafter. I have here shewed you what that work of God was in the days of old, and I have shewed you, what that work of God is in our day; I have also shewed you the evil of these Penal Laws, and have answered the Objections; that are usually made against their being taken away, I have also shewed you, how Popery may be kept out of this Kingdom, and it may be love may say I have said too little, and envy may say I have said too much; and who can please all? My design in all this, is the glory of God, the honour of the King and the good of all his subjects; *Love the brother-hood. Fear God. Honour the King*, 1 *Peter* 2. 17.

Postscript.

Postscript.

IT is often alledged, That if the Test should be taken away, then the Papists will come and sit in Parliament.

But how can the Papists sit in the House of Commons, unless the Protestants chuse them? How can they enter within them Walls, unless the Protestants open the Door, being in number more than two hundred to one Papist, throughout the whole Land. Is it not very unlikely at this time, that Protestants will chuse Papists for their Representatives in Parliament? Will they not rather chuse Men of their own Persuasions, that are most agreeable to their own Sentiments, from whom they may expect to reap the greatest

benefits, especially in a matter so great and weighty as this is? You therefore that are for the continuing the Penal Laws and Tests, let me then ask you these following Questions.

I. Whether the many Tests that have been made in this Kingdom, these many years past, did ever support, and preserve the Makers of them?

II. Whether these Tests be not Penal Laws?

III. Whether the present Tests be not against Religion and Liberty, which are so dear to all Men?

IV. How was Religion preserved, and kept up in this Kingdom, before these two late Tests were made?

V. Whether the Penal Laws and Tests have preserv'd Religion in this Nation, since they were made, or destroyed it?

VI. Whether

VI. Whether the Penal Laws and Tests, be then the Bulwark of the Protestant Religion against Popery?

VII. Whether you can find any Men, that have been Persecutors, and Spoilers of others, for their Consciences towards God, that are for the taking away Penal Laws and Tests?

VIII. Whether that be a True Church, that supports her self by Persecuting Laws, and enricheth her self by the Ruin of others?

IX. Whether Liberty of Conscience be not the Interest of this Nation?

X. Whether a Parliament may not be capable of finding out a better way, and a better security for our Liberty, and Religion, than these Tests are?

XI. Whether the Church of God hath not a better Refuge, and a stronger Tower to flie unto at all times, than Humane Laws, or an Arm of Flesh? *The Lord also will be a Refuge for the oppressed; a Refuge*

fuge in time of trouble, Psal. 9. 9. *The Lord is my strength, and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped*, Psal. 28. 7. *Our Soul waiteth for the Lord, he is our help, and our shield*, Psal. 33. 20. *For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong Tower from the Enemy*, Psal. 61. 3. *In God is my salvation, and my glory: The Rock of my strength, and my Refuge is in God*, Psal. 62. 7. *My Goodness, and my Fortress, my high Tower, and my Deliverer, my Shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my People under me*, Psal. 144. 2. *Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord, he is their Help, and their Shield*, Psal. 115. 11. *For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: No good thing will he with-hold from them that walk uprightly*, Psal. 84. 11. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength*, Isa. 26. 4.

FINIS.